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Services

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
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Friday, October 10, 2008

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October 10, 2008

Wayne County news briefs: No trial for dead boy's parents

DETROIT: No trial for dead boy's parents

The parents of a 2-year-old boy whose remains were found in the ceiling of a Detroit home in November will not stand trial in his death but still face other charges in the case.

Joseph Miller and Nickella Reid originally were charged with murder, abuse and fraud -- among other charges -- after the remains of Deuntay Miller were discovered in a home in the 15000 block of Lappin.

On Wednesday, 36th District Judge Donald Coleman dismissed murder, involuntary manslaughter and child abuse charges, but other charges of dismemberment and welfare fraud remain.

Prosecutors say the boy suffered from severe malnutrition and a slew of broken bones before his parents allegedly tried to cremate his body in a barbecue grill.

Reid, 24, and Miller, 28, both of Detroit, told police that they tried to avoid funeral costs.

Reid's mother, Doretha Lippett, 51, of Detroit also was charged with two counts of welfare fraud for her role in allegedly assisting Reid in collecting money in Deuntay's name after his death.

Wayne County prosecutors expect to appeal the ruling, spokeswoman Maria Miller said. If convicted on charges of welfare fraud and dismemberment, Joseph Miller and Reid could face up to 15 years in prison. A hearing is set for Wednesday in 3rd Circuit Court.



Friday, October 10, 2008

Pontiac

Singer must pay child support

Judge enters default order against West Bloomfield gospel artist J. Moss in Ga. woman's paternity lawsuit.

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

PONTIAC -- An Oakland Circuit Court judge has signed a default judgment in a paternity case against gospel recording artist J. Moss, ordering him to pay child support to a Georgia woman.

J. Moss, whose real name is James L. Moss Sr. and lives in West Bloomfield Township, was named in a paternity lawsuit filed in June by Lakisha Hughes, 28, of Douglasville, Ga., concerning her son, Christion, born March 15. A court-ordered DNA test subsequently determined the 36-year-old Moss is the boy's father with "99.9 percent" accuracy, according to the court file.

"I really don't wish to discuss this -- it's a difficult situation involving children, two families and also careers," said Hughes on Thursday.

Moss could not be reached for comment at his home or recording studio, PAJAM Music in Oak Park.

When Moss failed to respond to court filings, Oakland Circuit Judge Cheryl Matthews signed a judgment Monday prepared by the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office requiring Moss to pay \$1,028 a month support until the boy turns 18 years old.

Court documents reveal Hughes is unemployed, has a teenage daughter and is divorced. Moss is listed as married and has two other children with his wife. Court filings indicate Moss admitted to Hughes as being the father of her son and even sent her text messages regarding her pregnancy and the child -- and "I still have them," she noted in one filing.

Hughes and Moss never lived together, she told the court.

Hughes also said Moss offered to pay abortion expenses but never provided any of the medical care. He never visited the child, but had given her "a total of \$450 for Christion," she wrote.

Moss records and produces recordings under PAJAM Music. Hughes estimated in the court filing his gross monthly earnings at \$50,000.

Moss is the son of gospel star Bill Moss Sr. and grew up on tours with his father's group, Bill Moss and the Celestials, and a cousin's group, The Clark Sisters. Moss, who grew up in Detroit and attended Michigan State University for two years, is a tenor who plays keyboards and both writes and produces music with his production group PAJAM.

Moss has recorded several albums, including "The J. Moss Project" and was a co-writer and/or producer for others including Karen Clark-Sheard, Hezekiah Walker, N'SYNC, Michelle Williams, Trin-i-tee 5:7, Dru Hill and Boyz II Men. He has been nominated for a Grammy several times.

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Unions work to dispel voting myths at Flint town hall meeting

Posted by David Harris | The Flint Journal October 09, 2008 20:04PM

FLINT, Michigan -- Because potential voters sometimes are intimidated about voting, local union officials on Thursday worked to dispel the myths associated with casting a ballot.

Members from the trade organizations AFL-CIO and Coalition of Black Trade Unionists along with local officials held a town hall meeting to inform voters on their rights at the Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church, 5802 Dupont St., Flint.

Felons can vote as can those who are late on paying child support -- both of which are myths that sometimes prevent people from going to the polls, said Paul Long, Flint chapter president of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists.

"Those are all scare tactics," Long said. "We want to let people know that they have a right to vote, even if they are a little late on paying child support."

About 20 people attended the forum. Organizers past out fliers on voting rights and the language on the two Michigan ballot proposals.

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Foster Care Settlement Drawing Praise

<http://www.publicnewsservice.org/index.php?/content/article/6698-1>

October 10, 2008

Grand Rapids, MN - Children's advocates are applauding the settlement of a lawsuit against Michigan's foster care system. The settlement calls for a quarter-billion dollar package of reforms designed to improve the health and safety of almost 20,000 Michigan children who are in foster care.

Laura Mitchell, who oversees foster programs for *Lutheran Social Services of Michigan*, is encouraged that the agreement includes cutting the case loads of social workers, because it means children will get more attention.

"Reducing the case load means each worker will be able to do more true social work, as opposed to crisis management, when there is an issue that a child faces."

Mitchell says the caseload for foster care workers, now 30 children, will be cut in half. The agreement is the result of a class action lawsuit filed by the group "Children's Rights," which claimed Michigan wasn't protecting the children in the system from abuse and neglect.

Mitchell believes it's the kids who are the big winners in this settlement, because of increased individual attention from foster care workers.

"We will be able to spend more time with each child, look at that child's individual needs, and provide more support and more services to those children, their parents and their foster parents."

Mitchell says the basic fact of the settlement is that Michigan's foster care system will better serve the needs of the children under its care.

"Kids will be going home sooner, or made available for adoption sooner. And that is a very good outcome, because foster care is considered a temporary place for a child to be."

The settlement also requires establishment of a 24-hour hotline for reporting abuse and neglect, and is scheduled to be signed in two weeks. More information on foster care and adoption is available online at www.lssm.org.

Jim Wishner/Don Mathisen, Public News Service - MI



Published: October 10, 2008 09:52 am

Food Stamp Challenge aims to boost giving

By LINDSAY VANHULLE

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TRAVERSE CITY -- Valerie Shultz hasn't yet planned how she will prepare food next week for her family of three.

She'll only have about \$30 a person to spend on five days' worth of meals, and these days, a dollar doesn't stretch far.

Shultz, of Cadillac, signed up for the Food Stamp Challenge, a statewide simulation project that will allow participants to learn what life is like for the thousands of Michigan citizens who receive food assistance.

At least for a week.

"I just wanted to see how it would be if we had to live on food stamps," Shultz said. "It's going to be a challenge."

Starting Monday, participants will have no more than \$29.35 per person to purchase and prepare meals through Friday. That breaks down to \$5.87 per person, per day.

The goal isn't just for participants to view the lives of the region's poor from a new perspective. The hope is that it also will boost donations to area food pantries.

"There are so many people living in poverty that want to work, that want to better their lives," said Dawn McLaughlin, director of the state Department of Human Services for Grand Traverse and Leelanau counties. "With the price of food going up, it's really hard for people to be able to afford it."

Michigan's food assistance program comes in the form of a Bridge Card, and is meant to supplement incomes and food received from other sources, McLaughlin said.

A department audit revealed a 66 percent climb in the number of cases in both counties from 2004 to 2008, with 4,846 this past August compared to 2,920 four years earlier, said Debra Prohaska, of the local DHS office.

Whether the simulation will encourage giving remains to be seen, but Norm Bamberg, operations manager at the Father Fred Foundation in Traverse City, said people often give more when they see hardship firsthand.

Father Fred provides three-day supplies of food at a time, starting at a bag worth about \$40, Bamberg said. The organization used to base value at \$35 per bag, but adjusted it this month to reflect rising food prices. Yet it's about the same amount of food.

"(Giving is) very appealing when people can see something," he said. "People certainly can be more charitable."

To learn more, or to take the challenge, visit www.michigan.gov/poverty.



October 10, 2008

Food stamp fraud alleged

Associated Press

DETROIT - Federal prosecutors say a Detroit party store committed fraud to cash in on the government's food-stamp program.

The owner and two others associated with Express Lanes Party Store were indicted Thursday on charges of conspiracy and fraud.

Authorities say food-stamp recipients who wanted cash would allow the store to swipe their benefits card. For example, someone who wanted \$20 would agree to trade much more from the card.

The indictment says the Express Lanes store got more than \$900,000 in food-stamp credits over a 19-month period for less than half the value. Documents alleging fraud were first filed in 2006.

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PSC gives tips to lower natural gas pains

By Laura Mead - lmead@dailypress.net

POSTED: October 10, 2008

ESCANABA - Residents received advice on how to minimize the impact of rising natural gas rates during a Michigan Public Service Commission consumer forum at Bay College Thursday.

The forum allowed area residents to voice concerns and ask questions to commission members.

The Michigan Public Service Commission is staging forums in seven cities this fall to help consumers prepare for higher heating bills as winter approaches.

Orjiakor Isiogu, commission chairman, said natural gas costs are anticipated to be as much as 20 percent higher this winter. The hike is due to hurricanes and expected abnormal winter weather, he said.

To help consumers prepare for the increase, Isiogu went over ways to conserve energy.

"Customers need to be aware of conservation actions they can take and assistance programs that are available to them," he said.

Conservation tips included "dialing down" thermostats, insulating water heaters and pipes, keeping lights and appliances turned off and unplugged when not in use, replacing incandescent light bulbs with florescent ones, and more.

Assistance programs available to help consumers manage costs include the Winter Protection Plan, home heating credits, state emergency relief from the Michigan Department of Human Services, and community services.

The digital TV transition was also discussed.

By Feb. 17 all TV stations will broadcast in digital only. Consumers without digital television may be eligible for coupons worth \$40 to go towards the purchase of a converter box. These coupons can be found at www.DTV2009.gov.

During the question-and-answer segment, one resident asked whether there would be any changes in the next five years to increase Internet broadband services to rural areas.

"We would like to increase these services not only in the number of homes but to increase the speed,"

Article Photos



Orjiakor Isiogu

said Isiogu. "We'd like to have a mass deployment in the future."

Earlier Thursday, the public was also invited to a Michigan Renewable Energy Program meeting at Bay College during which using biomass as a fuel resource was discussed.

The meeting featured presentations on the feedstock/raw material supply chain, the combined efforts of Michigan State University and Michigan Technological University, and a summary of the energy bills passed by the state Legislature.

Donna LaCourt, Michigan Economic Development Corp., discussed the Renewable Portfolio Standard which mandates 10 percent of the state's energy comes from renewable sources by 2015. She then went on to discuss how Michigan will be able to meet this standard through its bioeconomy opportunities.

Developing the manufacturing technology for liquid fuel production and getting private landowners to agree to timber harvesting are among the challenges Michigan will face, said LaCourt.

Dr. Ray Miller, Michigan State University, discussed the research being conducted by MSU and MTU on the availability of woody feedstock.

Melissa Davis, managing director, New Power Tour, a U.P.-based nonprofit organization, discussed a proposed platform for local bioenergy, pairing a combined heat and power system with local grocers.

Julie Baldwin and Tom Stanton, Michigan Public Service Commission, then discussed the Clean, Renewable and Efficient Energy Act of 2008, which consists of three bills: Senate Bill 213, Senate Bill 1048, and House Bill 5524.

Senate Bill 213 establishes: Energy options for renewable energy and energy optimization; state government energy efficient and conservation goals; wind energy resource zones; and net metering standards.

Senate Bill 1048 establishes tax credits for the purchase and installation of "qualified home improvements" such as installation, furnaces, water heaters, windows and appliances. It states a tax credit is basically available for 2009-11, and the amount of credit is limited by income level and ranges from 10-25 percent of purchase and installation costs.

House Bill 5524 states that utilities must wait six months to implement rate changes after first announcing them, establishes certificate of need process for plant construction or power purchase agreements that will take six years or longer.

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Ways to beat rising energy costs

By [Natalie Zimmermann](#)

Thursday, October 09, 2008 at 10:22 p.m.



ESCANABA -- Pain at the pump is going to equate to pain in the home this winter as heating costs rise. At a consumer forum held Thursday night by the Michigan Public Service Commission, officials explained why the price of natural gas and other forms of energy are expected to spike 20 percent over last year.

"Energy costs trend, especially natural gas prices, trend the cost of crude oil," said Orijakor Isiogu, Chairman for the MPSC.

Because most companies buy their winter stores of fuel during the summer, when gas prices peaked, that cost is now going to trickle down to consumers.

It sounds like just more bad news, but there are things you can do to minimize energy bills this winter.

"The best advice I can give a family is to conserve energy, to use less," Isiogu said.

It's easier than you might think. Simple things like keeping the thermostat turned down when you're not at home can save you thousands a year. Making sure your house is properly insulated and having an energy-efficient furnace will also help keep those meter readings low.

Low-income Americans also have the option of getting assistance from the government to make sure they're not in the cold this winter. You can apply for a Home Heating Credit through the Michigan Department of Treasury.

There's good news for everyone, as well. Recent drops in the price of crude oil are positive indicators that next year energy costs will decrease as well.



MICHIGAN REPORT

The Capitol Record Since 1906

REPORT NO. 196, VOLUME 47-- THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9 2008

WORRIES ABOUT STATE BUDGET BEGINNING TO GROW

With the 2008-09 fiscal year just nine days old, concerns are already being raised about the current budget and whether the state will be forced to make cutbacks this year. Many of the concerns are being driven by the ongoing uncertainty in the national and international economies, but state officials are saying at this point that it is far too early to speculate on changes or cuts forecast for the budget.

Clearly, though, there is nervousness overall, especially as the panic-driven investors continue to drive stock prices into bargain sub-basement prices and the economy continues to contract partly as a result of the fear. On Thursday, for example, Standard & Poors forecast a significant slowing of consumer spending through the rest of 2008 and into 2009.

Add that to newly lowered forecasts for automotive sales (stocks for both General Motors and Ford Motor Company have been placed on credit watch by major rating agencies as they have sunk to new lows), and that will likely mean additional stress on Michigan's sales tax revenues for the fiscal year. (For the 2007-08 fiscal year that just ended, total sales tax revenues were expected to increase by just 1.5 percent. Through August it was up by 2 percent for the year.) Leslee Fritz, spokesperson for the State Budget Office, said there is not a state budget officer in the nation not nervously watching the economy, the national credit markets and other factors. But until there is a revenue estimating conference to determine revenues for the current fiscal year are declining, the state will not take action to cut budgets, she said. A revenue estimating conference is not scheduled until January although officials could request a special meeting if they felt it necessary.

[Governor Jennifer Granholm](#) more than a year ago issued directives to state departments limiting spending, and those remain in effect, Ms. Fritz said.

In addition, officials are hopeful that when the books close on the 2007-08 fiscal year it will leave a surplus that can be applied to the current fiscal year.

But Thursday, an article in the online section of Business Week listed Michigan was being 19th out of 20 states that anticipate the greatest fiscal problems for current fiscal year. That itself was based on research from the national Center for Budget and Policy Priorities.

However, Ms. Fritz said the potential budget deficit the Business Week article cited for Michigan is the amount the state anticipated in May 2007 it would be short for the 2007-08 fiscal year. "That problem has already been solved," she said.

Also on Thursday, the Associated Press quoted House Fiscal Agency Director Mitch Bean as saying it was "reasonably certain" the state would have to make budget cuts this fiscal year. Based on current trends it was likely the state would have to reassess and lower its revenue estimates in January, Mr. Bean said.

According to the Business Week article, some 31 states face potential gaps in their revenues and budgets this fiscal year, which could total deficits of \$53.4 billion. The worst is California, which has a potential budget gap of 22.9 percent and a potential deficit of \$22.2 billion. California already shares with Louisiana the worst credit rating of all the states. Last week, the state notified the U.S. Department of Treasury it may ask for a loan of \$7 billion since it was unlikely to be able to acquire financing on the open market.

California was followed by Arizona and Florida in terms of the worse budget gaps, both at 19.9 percent. Arizona could see an estimated deficit of \$2 billion, while Florida could see a potential budget deficit of \$5.1 billion.

Some of the states faced relatively large deficits in percentage terms that were a drop in the bucket compared to other states. For example, Vermont was anticipated to have a budget gap of 6.8 percent but for the tiny state that amounts to a possible deficit of \$83 million.

The Business Week article said that Michigan could face a budget gap of 4.8 percent with a potential deficit of \$472 million, but Ms. Fritz said that figure is well over a year old.

And in other state fiscal news, Virginia, now one quarter into its fiscal year, announced Thursday that it was laying off more than 500 state workers to help keep its budget balanced.